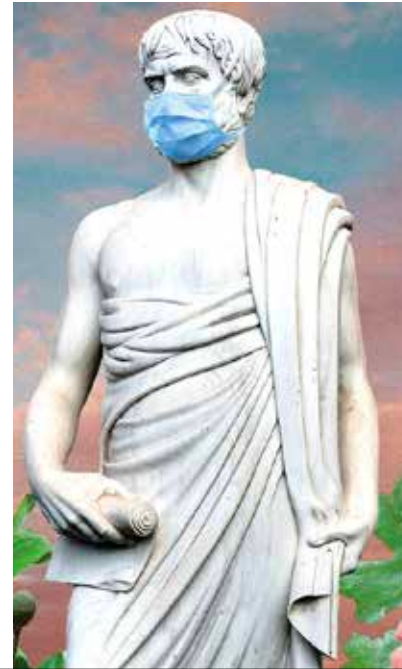


Pandemic Philosophy

Dr. Andrew Fiala
Department of Philosophy
Fresno State



Pandemic Philosophy

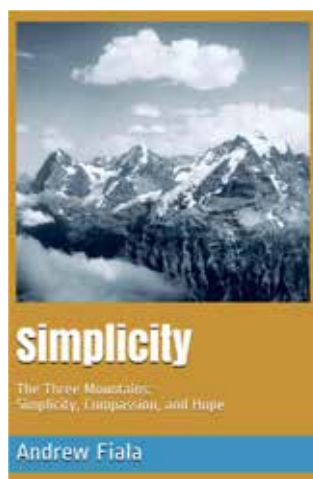
- TUESDAYS | Sept. 8, 15, 22, 29 2 - 3:30 p.m.
- This class will consider philosophical issues related to the pandemic, covering bioethics, politics, and spirituality. What are the ethical implications of quarantine, globalization, and concern for public health? What spiritual lessons can we learn about life, death, and meaning? What can ancient and modern philosophy teach us about living well in times such as these?
- Dr. Andrew Fiala is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Fresno State's Ethics Center. You can follow his blog at www.andrewfiala.com

Pandemic Philosophy Schedule/Plan

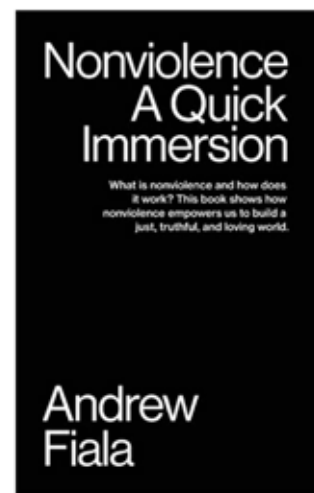
- September 8: The Bioethical
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 - Ethics of Quarantine
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- September 22: The Spiritual
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 - Aesthetics
 - Apocalypse
- September 29: The Existential
 - Individual Mortality
 - The Decline of Civilizations
 - The Plague Metaphor
 - The Indifference of Nature

Fiala Introduction

- www.andrewfiala.com
 - Join my email list!
- Follow on Facebook/Twitter: @PhilosophyFiala
- Amazon Author Page: <https://www.amazon.com/Andrew-G.-Fiala/e/B001IXOBAS>
- Fresno Bee: <https://www.fresnobee.com/living/liv-columns-blogs/andrew-fiala/>



<https://andrewfiala.com/simplicity/>



<https://andrewfiala.com/nonviolence-a-quick-immersion/>

The Ethics Center

<http://www.fresnostate.edu/artshum/ethicscenter/>

- @FresnoEthicsCenter; Youtube: Fresno State Ethics Center
- Saturday, Sept 12, 7PM, Channel 47:
Celebration of Ethics (<https://www.celebrationofethics.com/>)
- Tuesday, Sept 15, 4PM: Ethics of Democracy with Student Leaders
bit.ly/TECdemocracy20
- Thursday, Sept 17, 11AM: Elections, Trust, and Democracy
<https://fresnostate.zoom.us/j/93431046819> Meeting ID: 934 3104 6819
 - Lisa Bryant, Professor of Political Science, Fresno State
 - Brandi L. Orth, Fresno County Clerk/Registrar of Voters
 - Paul Gronke, Director of the Early Voting Information Center, Reed College

Wisdom and Courage, Hygiene and Hope

Fiala, *Fresno Bee*, Aug 15, 2020

<https://andrewfiala.com/wisdom-and-courage-hygiene-and-hope/>

- ... Some stability can be found, even in a storm. Hygiene provides a key. The word “hygiene” comes from a Greek word linked to health, harmony, and balance.
- The pandemic has given us a simple recipe for staying healthy. Keep your hands clean. Keep your face covered. And stay away from other people. This routine is also a useful metaphor for living well.
- Physical health matters. Wash your hands, get some exercise, and eat a balanced diet. But “keeping your hands clean” is also a moral idea. The Bible links clean hands to a pure heart. The Stoics said that it’s better to have clean hands than full ones.

Wisdom and Courage, Hygiene and Hope

Fiala, *Fresno Bee*, Aug 15, 2020

<https://andrewfiala.com/wisdom-and-courage-hygiene-and-hope/>

- Masking is another moral metaphor. A mask is a sign of modesty. Modest people keep themselves appropriately concealed. It is especially important to cover your mouth. Don't chew with your mouth open. Don't let your lips flap and your tongue wag. In fact, it is best to keep your mouth shut most of the time. In the Taoist tradition, a sage is pictured as someone who speaks without moving her lips.
- Social distancing is also healthy and wise. A virus can infect you. But so too can dumb ideas and bad habits. Solitude is a source of enlightenment. Solitude is not loneliness. Lonely people remain obsessed with other people. But you are not alone when you are one with the universe. You don't have to be a monk to understand that it is often better to mind your own business.
- Wisdom involves knowing who and what to ignore. It also demands that we pay attention. Compassion, love, and justice are crucial. But human beings have limited capacities and even love must be balanced with self-preservation. Be kind to strangers. But you can't save everyone. And the world won't change overnight.

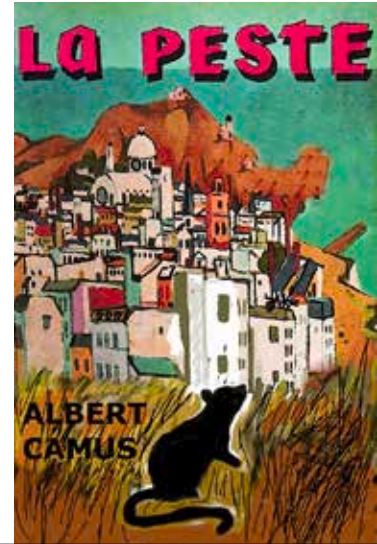
Fiala's Recipe for Moral Health



Keep your Hands Clean
Keep your Mouth Shut
Maintain Social Distance

We are never prepared for the pandemic

- Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.
- A pestilence isn't a thing made to man's measure; therefore we tell ourselves that pestilence is a mere bogey of the mind, a bad dream that will pass away. But it doesn't always pass away...
 - Albert Camus, *The Plague*



Pandemics in Philosophy/History

- The Plague of Athens (430 -426 BCE): Thucydides, Socrates, Plato
- The Antonine Plague (165 – 180 CE): Marcus Aurelius
- Black Death (1345 -1355): Boccaccio and *The Decameron*
- Camus, *The Plague* (1940's): Contagion, Totalitarianism, Resistance
- Themes/Ideas
 - Ideas as contagious
 - Pandemic: pandemonium, Pandora, and the god Pan
 - Chance and the need for courage, wisdom and discipline
 - Need for good governance
 - Need for morality, rationality, virtue
 - Plague and pestilence as metaphors

Socrates Survives Plague of Athens And gets a second wife

Socrates was **so orderly in his way of life** that on several occasions when pestilence broke out in Athens he was the only man who escaped infection.

Aristotle says that he married two wives: his first wife was Xanthippe, by whom he had a son, Lamprocles; his second wife was Myrto, whom he took without a dowry...

For they say that the Athenians were short of men and, wishing to increase the population, passed a decree permitting a citizen to marry one Athenian woman and have children by another; and that Socrates accordingly did so.

-Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, Book 2



Socrates and his two wives
Reyer van Blommendael, 1655

Thucydides: the Moral and Political Problem of the Plague of Athens

- Plague blamed on foreigners
- Despair and futility
- Moral decline and lawlessness
- Pericles died (429 BCE)
- Up to 100,000 Athenians died
- Athens lost the war with Sparta



Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* Blame the Foreigners

- The plague is said to have come first of all from Ethiopia beyond Egypt and from there it fell on Egypt and Libya and on much of the [other] lands. It struck the city of Athens suddenly. People in the Piraeus caught it first, and so, since there were not yet any fountains there, they actually alleged that the Peloponnesians had put poison in the wells



Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* Despair

- The most terrifying aspect of the whole affliction was the despair which resulted when someone realized that he had the disease: people immediately lost hope, and so through their attitude of mind were much more likely to let themselves go and not hold out. In addition, one person caught the disease through caring for another, and so they died like sheep: this was the greatest cause of loss of life. If people were afraid and unwilling to go near to others, they died in isolation, and many houses lost all their occupants through the lack of anyone to care for them.



Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* Lawlessness and Disorder

- Those who did go near to others died, especially those with any claim to virtue, who from a sense of honor did not spare themselves in going to visit their friends, persisting when in the end even the members of the family were overcome by the scale of the disaster and gave up their dirges for the dead.
- The disaster was overpowering, and as people did not know what would become of them, they tended to neglect the sacred and the secular alike. All the funeral customs which had previously been observed were thrown into confusion and the dead were buried in any way possible.

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* Moral Decline

- In other respects, too, the plague marked the beginning of a decline to greater lawlessness in the city. People were more willing to dare to do things which they would not previously have admitted to enjoying, when they saw the sudden changes of fortune, as some who were prosperous suddenly died, and their property was immediately acquired by others who had previously been destitute. So they thought it reasonable to concentrate on immediate profit and pleasure, believing that their bodies and their possessions alike would be short-lived. No one was willing to persevere in struggling for what was considered an honorable result, since he could not be sure that he would not perish before he achieved it. What was pleasant in the short term, and what was in any way conducive to that, came to be accepted as honorable and useful.

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* Moral Decline

- No fear of the gods or law of men had any restraining power, since it was judged to make no difference whether one was pious or not as all alike could be seen dying. No one expected to live long enough to have to pay the penalty for his misdeeds: people tended much more to think that a sentence already decided was hanging over them, and that before it was executed, they might reasonably get some enjoyment out of life.



Role of the Plague in Plato's Philosophy

- The Athenian background
- Mystical Power of Diotima
- Love of transcendent things
- Need for wise statecraft



Diotima's skill as a healer and diviner in plague: The mythical god-mother of philosophy

- SOCRATES: I shall recount for you speech about love I once heard from a woman of Mantinea, Diotima—a woman who was wise about many things besides love. Once **she even put off the plague for ten years by telling the Athenians what sacrifices to make.** She is the one who taught me the art of love (Plato, *Symposium*, 201d)



Plagues show that chance rules and we need wise statesmen

- Accidents and calamities occur in a thousand different ways. It is they that are the universal legislators of the world. If it isn't pressures of war that overturn a constitution and rewrite the laws, it's the distress of grinding poverty. **Disease too forces us to make a great many innovations, when plagues beset us for years on end and bad weather is frequent and prolonged.**
- **And so human affairs are almost entirely at the mercy of chance.**
- **BUT Chance can be responded to with skill**
 - (*by good laws and good statesmen)
 - Plato, *Laws*, 709



Ideal Pandemic Response

- Critical thinking
 - Calm and reasonable responses guided by knowledge, objectivity, modesty, and curiosity
- Compassion
 - Care for those who suffer and concern to prevent suffering of others
- Community spirit
 - Common sense of sacrifice and mutual support
- Virtue
 - Reasonable, disciplined, restrained, courageous, non-panic, take the long view

Non-ideal response

- Muddled Thinking
 - Reactive and unreasonable responses guided by rumor, self-interest, hubris, and self-aggrandizement
- Callousness
 - Indifference to those who suffer along with concern for profit and self-protection
- Polarization
 - Distrustful struggles for power and advantage
- Vice
 - Irrational, undisciplined, panicked, narrowly focused, selfish, hedonistic

Recent News



“Politicizing the China Virus”

White House Statement, August 10, 2020

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-briefing-august-10-2020/>

- We must stop politicizing the virus and instead be united in our condemnation of how this virus came to America, how this virus came to the world, and we are going to figure it out, and we are going to find out, and we are very angry about it.
- Also, in unemployment benefits and to extend the freeze on home evictions — we want to extend the freeze so people aren’t evicted. It’s not their fault that the virus came from China. It’s China’s fault.
- They should have never allowed what happened to the world, including us. But this was released into Europe and it was released into the U.S. and it was released all throughout the world, but it wasn’t released into China.



US goes it alone with Covid vaccine

Washington Post, Sept. 2, 2020

- The Trump administration said it will not join a global effort to develop, manufacture and equitably distribute a [coronavirus](#) vaccine, in part because the World Health Organization is involved, a decision that could shape the course of the pandemic and the country’s role in health diplomacy.
- More than 170 countries [are in talks](#) to participate in the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access (Covax) Facility, which aims to speed vaccine development, secure doses for all countries and distribute them to the most high-risk segment of each population.



US goes it alone with Covid vaccine Washington Post, Sept. 2, 2020

- The United States will not participate, in part because the [White House does not want to work with the WHO](#), which President Trump has criticized over what he characterized as its “China-centric” response to the pandemic.
- “The United States will continue to engage our international partners to ensure we defeat this virus, but we will not be constrained by multilateral organizations influenced by the corrupt World Health Organization and China,” said Judd Deere, a spokesman for the White House.



With Trump promising a COVID-19 vaccine 'very soon,' industry developers pledge to keep politics out of science

USA Today, Sept 8, 2020

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/09/08/covid-19-vaccine-developers-letter-politics-science/5741193002/>

- The heads of nine biopharmaceutical companies issued a letter early Tuesday pledging to fully vet their COVID-19 candidate vaccines before asking for federal approval to market them.
- "We, the undersigned biopharmaceutical companies, want to make clear our on-going commitment to developing and testing potential vaccines for COVID-19 in accordance with high ethical standards and sound scientific principles," the statement said.
- The statement comes amid [increasing concern](#) among public health officials, scientists and doctors that the White House might bring significant political pressure to bear on the Food and Drug Administration to approve a vaccine before the Nov. 3 presidential election

Bioethical Issues

- Health Care
- Public Health
- Ethics of Quarantine

- Asclepius and Hygeia
- Does health come from the gods...?
- What is the human responsibility for health?



- Health as Wholeness—and Holiness (?)
 - Health—Hail—Whole (cf. to heal is to make whole)
 - Healing and Holy (Webster's Dictionary, 1840's)
 - "To heal is to make whole"
 - To restore purity and remove corruption

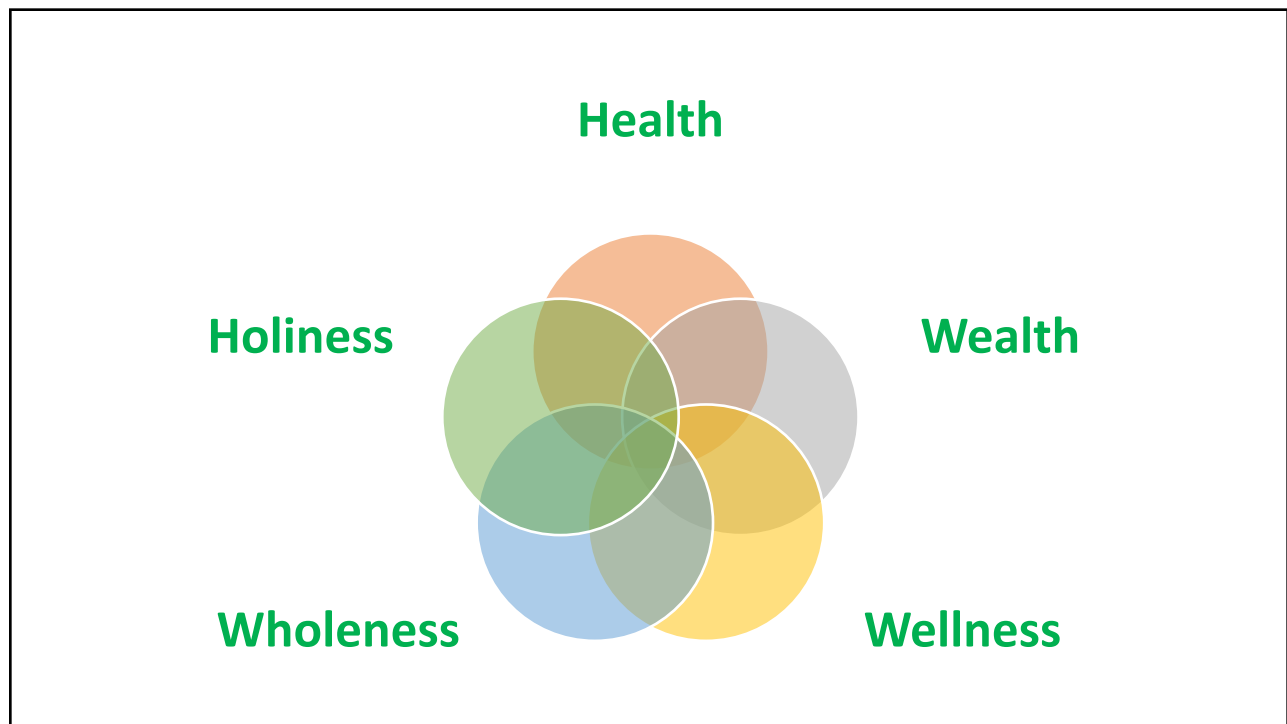
I will *heal* their backsliding (Hos xiv)

Thus, saith the Lord, I have *healed* these waters. No longer will it cause death or unfruitfulness (2 Kings 11)

- Health as Wellness = well-being
 - Well (German: *Wohl*)
 - Proper, just, with skill: "do do something well"
 - Abundantly: "the lawn was well watered"
 - With praise or favor: "to speak well of someone"
 - Far: "to be well-advanced in life"—and "also" = "as well as"
 - To spring up or swell (ex. Emotions or tears "well up")

"Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise"
Poor Richard (Franklin)

- Related to (?) "wealth"
 - Prosperity, abundance, flourishing
 - Vs. "dearth" (cf. "health" as wholeness/fullness = not a dearth)



Health care Issues : Right or Privilege?

- Is health a “right” or a “privilege”? Or a “product” to be purchased?
- Does “justice” apply in health and health care? Equality of outcome? Equal opportunity? Non-discrimination?
- What is the best mechanism? Free market? Regulated and subsidized market (Affordable Care Act = right to buy insurance)? Socialized medicine?

Pope Francis on Twitter Oct 2018



Pope Francis ✓

@Pontifex

Follow

Health is not a consumer good, but a universal right: let us unite our efforts so that health services are available to all.

[#HealthForAll](#)

4:30 AM - 25 Oct 2018

Right to healthcare in International Context

- UN Declaration of Human Rights (**Article 25**)
 - (1) Everyone has the **right to a standard of living adequate for the health** and well-being of himself and of his family, including **food, clothing, housing and medical care** and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
- World Health Organization (Preamble)
 - The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.
 - Governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures

Ron Paul: “No right to medical care” Sept. 23, 2009—in Congress

- No one has a right to medical care. If one assumes such a right, it endorses the notion that some individuals have a right to someone else’s life and property. This totally contradicts the principles of liberty.
- If medical care is provided by government, this can only be achieved by an authoritarian government unconcerned about the rights of the individual.



- <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2009/09/ron-paul/there-is-no-right-to-health-care/>

Weighing the “right” to health care against other “rights”

- Right to K-12 public education
 - What about right to college education?
- Right to defense, law enforcement, legal assistance
 - Cf. the “Night Watchman State”
- Right to housing, minimum wage, living wage?
- If resources are limited, which “rights” ought we pay for?

Health as Complete Well-Being

Can we actually provide it for everyone?

- *Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*

- World Health Organization definition



- Does everyone have a right to complete well-being? Who should pay for it?
- **How do we balance emotional, psychological, and social health?**
- **Ex. School reopening vs. Covid-19?**



What amount of healthcare?

• Basic health maintenance

- Food, water, air, shelter
- Symptomatic care and cures for basic illness
- Prevention of basic disease
 - Immunization
 - Nutrition, exercise, environmental

• Higher quality care

- Disability support
- Cures for exotic and rare diseases
- Genetic treatments, therapies, and selection/screening
- Cosmetic (aesthetic) medicine
- Life extension

- How do we evaluate vaccines, masking, social distancing restrictions? Is this "basic" health or high quality?
- Who has a right to survive the pandemic?
- What about the aged, pre-existing conditions, etc?

Public Health: *res publica* and the commonwealth

- Who is the public?
- What counts as “healthy”
- Problems of the Pandemic
 - Primary Victims: Old people, disabled people, poor people, and non-White people
 - Pre-existing conditions in these communities
 - What about non-Americans and the global nature of the pandemic?
 - How do we balance economic health with physical health?
 - What does social justice and political turmoil have to do with the health of the *res publica*?



Quarantine Ethics

Fiala in *Fresno Bee*, February 9, 2020

<https://andrewfiala.com/quarantine-ethics/>

- Coronavirus quarantines are spreading. Fifty million people have been quarantined in China. Hong Kong has quarantined people from the Chinese mainland. A cruise ship remains quarantined in Japan. The U.S. banned entry for people traveling from China while slapping a 14-day quarantine on Americans returning from China.
- The Chinese government has warned of fear-mongering. But a pandemic is a scary thing. Contagion conjures images of the Black Death and the zombie apocalypse. But quarantines are also frightening. Imagine desperate people pounding on the gates that lock them in with the disease.

Quarantine Ethics

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- Quarantines may not seem controversial, when viewed from the standpoint of public health. The goal is to prevent infected people from spreading the disease. To defend the majority, some people's liberty is limited.
- China, a country of 1.4 billion people, may not be overly concerned about violating the rights of 50 million. But it would be difficult to imagine this happening in the U.S. If the disease spreads here, would we be willing to restrict the liberty of 50 million Americans?
- One concern is people in the quarantine zone who are not yet infected. A quarantine that puts healthy people at risk seems to violate the basic principle of medical ethics that demands that we "do no harm."
- Some may simply bite the utilitarian bullet and say that in the name of the greater good, some healthy people's rights may be violated. But the healthy person may disagree. Would a healthy person in quarantine be wrong to try to escape? And if they got infected, would they have a right to sue for damages?

Quarantine Ethics

Fiala in *Fresno Bee*, February 9, 2020

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- Quarantines are not as easy to justify as we might think. Bioethicist George Annas has argued that quarantine is an "arbitrarily draconian" measure and a "relic of the past that has outlived its usefulness."
- The practice has medieval roots. Centuries ago, plague prevention required 40 days of isolation. The name "quarantine" comes from the Italian word for forty. But why 40 days? Well, in the Bible, the number is connected to a mystical process of purification. It rained for 40 days and nights during Noah's flood. Moses wandered for forty years in the desert. And Jesus fasted for 40 days.
- We no longer believe in supernatural numerology. The proposed quarantine for coronavirus is based upon a 14-day incubation period. But scientific and political judgment can be influenced by cultural factors.
- Consider the exotic source of recent pandemic threats: Ebola comes from Africa; coronavirus from China. Racial and cultural assumptions may make us think in terms of preventing "them" from infecting "us." Quarantine can reinforce discrimination and prejudice.

Quarantine Ethics

Fiala in *Fresno Bee*, February 9, 2020

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- A long-run solution to pandemic threats must work in the opposite direction. We ought to improve the sanitary conditions and general health of people in the developing world — and here at home. If people everywhere had access to adequate health care, the risk of contagion would be minimized. Quarantine is a short-term solution to a problem that is ultimately about global justice in health care.
- A related consideration is science education. In the background is the anti-vaccination crowd. An outbreak of measles that killed at least 63 people last year in Samoa was blamed on anti-vax messaging. A prominent anti-vaxxer was arrested. In the U.S., the First Amendment would seem to prevent the arrest of those who dispute the science of public health. Nonetheless, science literacy and education about preventive health care are essential.

Quarantine Ethics

Fiala in *Fresno Bee*, February 9, 2020

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- Finally, it is worth considering whether we have an obligation to give special care to those who are quarantined. It would be wrong to shut the gates and leave people in quarantine to suffer. In fact, since we are violating their liberty and putting them at risk for our benefit, we may even owe them special compensation.
- Critical thinking about all of this is made more difficult by panicked responses. Unfortunately, these are reactionary times. Fear of contagion is exacerbated by zombie movies and rising animosity toward immigrants. Feverish overreaction must be moderated by common sense and careful consideration of medical ethics.
- A quarantine is a morally problematic emergency last resort. We should work harder to prevent those emergencies in the first place. We ought to care for the sick. And we must address the long-term challenges of global public health.

Conclusions

- Critical thinking
 - Calm and reasonable responses guided by knowledge, objectivity, modesty, and curiosity
- Compassion
 - Care for those who suffer and concern to prevent suffering of others
- Community spirit
 - Common sense of sacrifice and mutual support
- Virtue
 - Reasonable, disciplined, restrained, courageous, non-panic, take the long view



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